



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Regular Meeting on January 22, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. The presiding officer was Karen Dionne. Board members present were Sara Volino, Mark Lombardi, Spencer Morris, Christine Lichatz, Moe Clare and Benjamin Terry. Board members Kate Dickson and Patrick DeSocio were absent. Brandt Heckert was present at the meeting as a guest. Town Manager Gordon and Town Council President Stanley were also in attendance. Ex officio member Caroline Wells was absent. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Regular Meeting of December 17, 2012 and the Special Meeting of January 7, 2013

The minutes from the regular meeting held on December 17, 2012 and the Special Meeting of January 7, 2013 were reviewed by the board via email. A motion was made by Ms. Volino to accept the minutes from the regular meeting of December 17th and the Special Meeting of January 7th, the motion was seconded by Mr. Terry and all members were in favor.

2. Discussion regarding future direction and new work plan items for EDB (with Town Council President Stanley and Town Manager Gordon)

Ms. Dionne introduced the topic of new work plan items for the EDB. In an effort to improve communication between the EDB and town government, Ms. Volino asked for regularly scheduled workshops with the EDB and Town Council and the Town Manager. Key questions for Mr. Stanley and Mr. Gordon regarded the process of approval for the completed EDB section of the Comprehensive Plan, and also issues of enforcement of existing ordinances within the business district.

Mr. Stanley said that the question regarding the Comprehensive Plan was better directed to Caroline Wells because she would know the exact timeline of the process, although he did say that the overall process might be taking too long. He also felt that communication between the EDB and town government was improving through past workshops. Although Mr. Stanley and Mr. Gordon had explored the merits of a "point person" at Town Hall, Mr. Stanley expressed his concern about the EDB budget request for \$80,000 for the proposed economic development coordinator position. Ms. Volino stated that the amount was based on Mr. Stanley's job description for the position, but Mr. Stanley countered that he had put this proposal together only as a conversation starter to move forward.

Mr. Lombari felt it was important that Mr. Gordon review the work responsibilities of the current town employees before hiring someone for a new position; Mr. Gordon agreed that the departments within Town Hall must be organized and if necessary be restructured to respond to economic development matters such as being more welcoming and more receptive and responsive to business needs.

Mr. Gordon also discussed zoning issues, and said it was his opinion that sometimes zoning ordinances have to be readjusted to respond to new business concepts. Ms. Volino responded that the Board is frustrated because there has been no feedback on recommendations regarding signage ordinances requested almost two years ago. Ms. Dionne added that the most effective strategy to make the town more attractive for economic development would be to improve the appearance of the business district, signage being one particular aspect that needs attention. Mr. Stanley suggested a well crafted memo from the EDB to the Town Council regarding signage would be the first step to move this issue further.

As far as the budget request for the economic development coordinator, Ms. Dionne stated that the request for \$80,000 was a conversation starter, and that the Board realized that the position might more practically be a part-time position with the EDB potentially taking over some of the tasks. Mr. Gordon suggested the EDB might have some sort of a business resource account so that EDB members could attend meetings. Mr. Heckert felt that the efforts of the board alone would not replace the presence of a designated point person. Mr. Lombari stated that the town needs to develop a concrete mission statement to both guide future economic development as well unify the town in order to develop an effective marketing plan for Warren. Mr. Terry said economic development responsibilities are a subset of the planning department in other towns. The Board also discussed the role of groups like the East Bay Chamber of Commerce and Discover Warren.

Mr. Gordon asked for a liaison from the EDB who could meet with him on various issues on an as needed basis.

At this time, Mr. Stanley and Mr. Gordon left the meeting.

3. Discussion regarding economic developer coordinator position (with Town Council President Stanley and Town Manager Gordon)

This item was included within the discussion of the prior agenda item.

4. Discussion regarding open seats for the EDB

Currently there are potentially two open seats on the EDB. Mr. Clare will be filling the seat vacated by the resignation of Mr. Heckert. Ms. Dickson will also be resigning from the EDB; Mr. DeSocio, although he has not officially resigned from the Board, has not attended a meeting since the summer. Ms. MacDonald offered to send an email to Mr. DeSocio to request that he submit his letter of resignation to the Town Manager so that the open position on the EDB can officially be posted by the town.

5. Discussion of status of the downtown business district CDGB grant

Ms. Dionne reported that according to Caroline Wells there have been several applicants for the storefront improvement project; the challenge will be to find applicants that have matching funds available to participate in the program. Ms. Dionne said that she would contact Ms. Wells regarding ways the EDB can help promote or support this project.

6. Discussion of ShipShape Challenge and possible transfer to EDB oversight

The Board discussed the future direction of the ShipShape Challenge and the need for a strong individual, possibly from the business community, to take over the role of chairperson from Kate Dickson of Discover Warren. Mr. Heckert suggested that the scope of the project could be narrowed down to make the project more manageable going forward.

A motion was made to adjourn by Mr. Terry, the motion was seconded by Mr. Lichatz, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald

February 15, 2013

